

VZCZCXRO3696
RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHHI #1099/01 1640930
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 130930Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5631
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 3233
RHEHNSC/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEHXS/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 001099

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH PRESIDENT TRIET TO DISCUSS U.S.
VISIT

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) During a June 13 meeting with the Ambassador, President Nguyen Minh Triet strongly underlined his hope that his upcoming visit to the United States and meeting with President Bush will help to advance the bilateral relationship and deepen Vietnam's friendship with the United States. The Ambassador and Triet discussed human rights at length, and the Ambassador expressed hope that the United States and Vietnam would be able to find concrete ways to cooperate in the areas of rule of law, good governance and anti-corruption. Triet stated in familiar terms Vietnam's concerns with "terrorists" and "lawbreakers," and asked that human rights "not be raised highly" during his meeting with President Bush. Triet also expressed confidence that a number of potential deliverables in the areas of anti-money laundering, intellectual property rights protection and peaceful use of nuclear energy, would be wrapped up in time. On Peace Corps, Triet listened with interest as the Ambassador explained the USG position, and pledged to study the matter and respond soon. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador met for nearly an hour June 13 with President Nguyen Minh Triet to discuss Triet's upcoming visit to the United States and June 22 meeting with President Bush. The Ambassador opened by underlining the significant progress our two countries have made over the past two years, particularly in 2006 with President Bush's visit to Vietnam. President Triet's upcoming meeting with President Bush will be the senior most interaction this year, and it will be an important occasion to maintain the bilateral relationship's momentum. While the United States and Vietnam hope that the visit will be a success, both sides need to take steps to make this happen, and the key will be for us to be able to look back and describe in concrete terms what we accomplished during the visit.

Human Rights

¶3. (SBU) One issue that President Triet's visit could help to advance is human rights, the Ambassador continued. This is a matter of particular concern to the American people, USG and U.S. Congress, and will no doubt be raised during President Triet's discussions in the United States. One way for our two countries to engage cooperatively on human rights is through bilateral programs in the areas of good governance, rule of law and anti-corruption. DPM/FM Khiem recently responded (on behalf of President Triet) to Senator Leahy's letter proposing cooperative activities in these areas, and this was a step in the right direction. However, both sides will need to work hard to turn this positive sentiment into concrete implementation.

Visit Deliverables

¶4. (SBU) Another very important aspect of the bilateral relationship is trade and investment, the Ambassador went on. Through both sides' hard work, we have reached agreement in principle on a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, the signing of which would be a major step in our commercial and economic relationship. However, it would be disappointing if a TIFA signing were the sole deliverable of the visit. Both sides are working hard to bring to closure agreements on the Peace Corps, intellectual property rights protection, peaceful use of nuclear energy and very important commercial deals. All of these agreements are within sight, but we will need to work hard to finalize them in time for the visit. In addition, we need to find ways to deepen and institutionalize cooperation on anti-money laundering.

Dioxin

¶5. (SBU) A subject that the United States and Vietnam can point to with pride is that of our cooperative efforts to address dioxin, the Ambassador noted. Since Presidents Bush and Triet included the matter in their November 2006 Joint Statement, we have seen significant progress, and the U.S. Congress recently appropriated USD three million for environmental remediation and support for health programs near contaminated sites. Once internal USG discussions are completed, we will coordinate with the GVN on how best to move forward, the Ambassador said.

Progress Possible For Some Deliverables

¶6. (SBU) President Triet agreed that bilateral relations have developed well over the past several years and expressed his hope that his visit to the United States will help to further enhance bilateral friendship and cooperation. For its part, the GVN will "do more" to conclude as soon as possible the various agreements

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raised by the Ambassador. Within the GVN, particular ministries and organizations have been tasked with discussing these agreements with their American counterparts, and while there is agreement on the agreements' goals, differences remain regarding specific contents.

¶7. (SBU) Peace Corps is one example, President Triet noted. The GVN agreed to receive 20 volunteers, but the USG wants to send more. The GVN would like to proceed in a step-by-step manner and consider at a later date increasing the number of volunteers; this approach better suits Vietnam, and President Triet asked the Ambassador to "please explain this" to Washington. Triet was more optimistic about other agreements. On anti-money laundering cooperation, "there should be no hurdles" because Vietnam "always opposes money laundering." Intellectual property rights protection cooperation should also go smoothly because, as a new member of WTO, Vietnam needs to comply with the organization's regulations. Regarding a peaceful use of nuclear energy agreement, Vietnam has no desire to use nuclear energy for anything but peaceful ends, namely to provide electricity to fuel its economic growth. On these and other agreements, the MFA and other relevant agencies will work closely with the Embassy and USG to bring them to a close.

Triet Responds on Human Rights

¶8. (SBU) Turning to human rights, President Triet stated flatly that, during his U.S. visit and discussions with President Bush, both sides will not resolve their differences on this matter. The two countries still have different conceptions about human rights, different legal systems and different levels of development. This is true everywhere in the world. Therefore, both sides need to understand each other better. For its part, Vietnam will try to narrow the gap with the United States. But the United States must understand that, with its low per capita income of under USD 1,000/year, Vietnam's number one goal is economic growth, and to achieve this it needs stability. Vietnam condemns all obstacles to

development and growth, such as corruption and trafficking and use of narcotics.

¶9. (SBU) Vietnam also condemns terrorist acts, President Triet continued, and Vietnam cannot accept those who want to overthrow the government. The GVN only punishes those who violate Vietnam's laws; "we do not punish dissidents," he stressed. Those who were arrested had established and participated in organizations, with the help of overseas groups, whose aim was to overthrow the government. If the same thing happened in the United States, surely the USG would take action and punish these individuals. Vietnam and the United States continue to have differences, but they can be addressed through dialogue.

¶10. (SBU) During the meeting with President Bush, if human rights "gets put on the table," it will not be in the interest of both countries, President Triet went on. Of course, President Bush will likely raise this matter, but he should take into consideration that the issue of human rights is discussed often and in other fora. "It would be better for President Bush and I to highlight other issues in the bilateral relationship," President Triet suggested. If the issue of human rights is "raised too highly" in the discussions, "this may erase some of the goodwill" that the Vietnamese people have towards the United States, President Triet said.

¶11. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that the United States raises human rights because it is a core American value and a concern of the international community. If individuals plan to use or call for violence to effect political change, then they should be stopped. However, if they use words or thoughts to do the same, then this should be allowed, as stated in the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights, of which Vietnam is a signatory. We look forward to the day when there is more political space in Vietnam, the Ambassador said. The United States would also like to see the release of detained and imprisoned political activists, but we know this will not happen overnight. However, we hope that it happens soon, just as we were pleased that Nguyen Vu Binh was released and allowed to rejoin his family.

¶12. (SBU) This is why we raised the issue of cooperative programs in the area of rule of law and elsewhere, the Ambassador continued. Part of Vietnam's reform agenda is legal and judicial reform, and we can work together on this usefully. While a bilateral dialogue on our differences regarding human rights is important and should continue, it is not enough. We need to construct a way to work together to put our thoughts into action, the Ambassador said.

Further Push Needed On Agreements, Including Peace Corps

¶13. (SBU) Similarly, although both sides want a number of official and commercial agreements to happen, we need to address the details. Hopefully, Boeing and other important deals can be concluded soon;

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it would be disappointing if President Triet's visit did not yield any major commercial deals, in spite of the hard work of both sides. A Gannon power plant deal may be close, and hopefully we can bring it to closure and speak publicly about it, the Ambassador said.

¶14. (SBU) On Peace Corps, the Ambassador said he recognizes that a step-by-step approach is necessary, but the real issue is the size of these steps. It makes no financial sense to start Peace Corps off in Vietnam without a reasonable platform size, and this has to be more than 20 volunteers. Responding to President Triet's invitation to discuss this in more detail, the Ambassador explained that, in addition to four staff members (which we have agreed on), we would have 30 volunteers for 27 months; after this initial group's first 15 months, another 30 volunteers would arrive, leading to a total of 60 volunteers and four staff at any one time. Both sides have also agreed that the volunteers would focus on education and would be based in Hanoi and HCMC. President Triet responded that Vietnam will take this matter seriously and provide an answer "before the Ambassador departs" (June 16).

¶15. (SBU) Wrapping up, the Ambassador also noted that both sides

should continue to work hard on concrete measures to build the relationship, especially immediately after President Triet's visit. Besides the Boeing and Gannon projects, there are many other commercial deals in the pipeline, as well as a number of other important agreements requiring further progress, such as for New Embassy Compound land and to open new consular offices in each other's country. President Triet expressed his thanks for the Ambassador's contributions to the bilateral relationship and repeated his hope that his upcoming visit to the United States will help to advance our two countries' ties. "The most important thing is to improve our cooperation and friendship; Vietnam wants to enhance its relationship with the United States," he stressed. President Triet concluded by asking to see the Ambassador again before he finishes his assignment in Vietnam.

MARINE